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SUBJECT: PROJECT PROPOSAL FOR THE PRM AMBASSADOR'S FUND FOR REFUGEES

REF: STATE 6779

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Post is pleased to endorse the African Refugee Development Center's (ARDC) project proposal to establish a community center for African asylum-seekers in Israel. Over 10,000 African asylum-seekers have entered Israel in the past two years. While UNHCR is working with Israeli authorities to receive, register and interview this population, UNHCR Representative Steven Wolfson acknowledges that UNHCR is unable to fulfill an important need, namely legal aid, health and education services and basic assistance. ARDC currently operates shelters for refugees in Tel Aviv and hopes to establish a community center that would provide a safe environment for African asylum-seekers to access cultural orientation classes, Hebrew language training, job placement assistance, and psycho-social counseling. End Summary.

African Refugee Development Center (ARDC)

¶2. (SBU) ARDC was founded in 2004 by Yohannes Lemma, an Ethiopian refugee who entered Israel in 1999 as an asylum-seeker and is now a legal resident of Israel. Lemma works a night job in Jerusalem and spends his days in Tel Aviv helping others like himself. His dedication has inspired scores of Israelis and other expatriates, including lawyers, social workers, and doctors, to volunteer for ARDC.

¶3. (SBU) To date, ARDC activities have focused exclusively on providing shelter to newly-arrived asylum-seekers, but that was not Lemma's vision or intention when he founded the organization. ARDC's goals are to promote humane and fair policies on the reception, protection and integration of asylum-seekers and refugees; to assist refugees and asylum-seekers in leading independent, productive, and dignified lives; to facilitate their participation and empowerment of refugees and asylum-seekers through their inclusion in education opportunities, the labor market and health care; and to facilitate the integration in and interaction with Israeli society through cultural exchange and bridging programs.

Project Proposal: An Educational Program for Asylum-Seekers

¶4. (SBU) ARDC is requesting \$19,889 to support the establishment of a community center where African asylum-seekers can come for cultural orientation, Hebrew language classes, job placement, and counseling. The program will specifically focus on children's needs through a "Children's Place" providing a pre-school and drop-in program for ages 3-12 years and a "Life Skills Program" for youth ages 13-18 years providing Hebrew language classes, computer training, sports, and field trips promoting an understanding of Israeli culture. ARDC estimates that 30-35 youth will immediately benefit from one-on-one care and counseling by a professional volunteer social worker and a mentoring program that will join refugee children with local Israeli mentors.

15. (SBU) ARDC has identified volunteer teachers, psychologists, and social workers who will deliver the services and programs. Extensive media coverage of this issue in Israel has led to dozens of Israelis volunteering for ARDC; the organization is now in the privileged position of "picking and choosing" its volunteer manpower. For the first year, the activities will take place in a core facility consisting of 4 rooms provided for a fee by a local community center. The facility will feature a small community library with study materials and an adjoining study room for the children.

16. (SBU) Total program cost for the community center is \$100,179, which includes renting a four-room facility, salary for a part-time coordinator, supplies (e.g., books, art supplies, educational materials) and equipment (e.g., computers, furniture, copier). PRM support is specifically requested for rent (\$9,257), utilities (\$3,086), books (\$1,930), art supplies (\$2,286), and field trips (\$1,200) with a 12% overhead of \$2,131. In addition to the Ambassador's Fund request of \$19,889, ARDC is seeking support from private foundations and individuals. Thus far, ARDC has successfully raised \$56,110, much of it in-kind support, such as computers and furniture, from Israeli organizations, and has been approved for \$2,650 of support through the PD-administered Small Grants program.

17. (SBU) Post requests the Department to consider funding the ARDC project proposal as it fills an unmet gap in assistance to African asylum-seekers in Israel. If PRM approves this project, Post certifies that it has the authority and capacity to award a grant to ARDC.

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JONES